

***Statement: Pastor AJ Johnson HB 5371: AN ACT CONCERNING A MINIMUM WORK WEEK FOR PERSONS PERFORMING BUILDING MAINTENANCE SERVICES***

Good afternoon and thank you members of the Labor and Public Service Committee. My name is AJ Johnson and I am the Senior Pastor at Urban Hope Refuge Church. I'm here today to testify in support of Raised Bill 5371, the Connecticut Better Jobs Act.

I support the Better Jobs Act because as a man of faith I believe the Christian story, one that begins with a homeless family forced to immigrate to a foreign land, fearful of those who controlled the wealth of their nation. They wanted a better life for their son and endured trials and hardships, much like many workers do today.

There is too much poverty and inequality in Connecticut. That's not a secret. We live in a state where nearly a third of all children are poor or near poor<sup>1</sup>. This is an outrage and a shame. As if that wasn't bad enough, it was reported this spring that unlike any other state in the nation, Connecticut's rate of childhood poverty has actually increased.

As we all know, poverty which creates situations like crowded housing, frequent moves, hunger and parents who are struggling to juggle multiple jobs is extremely disruptive to a child's life and wellbeing. How can we start to take steps to undo some of these social maladies? We can start but making sure that labor, work done by human beings, with its intrinsic dignity, is justly compensated and rightly allocated. There's value in working hard to support our families, our communities, our small businesses. Shouldn't we foster and encourage jobs that ensure that families and communities can flourish rather than promoting the degradation of working conditions to a point where people are no longer seen as people but as numbers? 20 hours, low pay, no healthcare. Should that be the norm?

We all know from the fight for \$15 that families need a raise. Too many people are forced to get by on too little. But, a higher minimum wage alone is not enough. If Mom or Dad is only working 20 hours a week, even at \$15 an hour, you just cannot support a family on that. To make things worse, a person who is working less than 30 hours a week is not entitled to employer-provided healthcare. The only thing standing between a family and financial devastation when someone gets seriously ill is their ability to rely on government assistance.

It's clear that as the fight for fair wages picks up steam, we also need to be fighting for adequate hours too. Higher wages without adequate hours won't suffice. We need a living wage and livable hours! This is a new kind of solution to an age old problem and we should be the first to be brave enough to act in new ways. Connecticut has often led the way on many compassionate policy reforms, from adopting the TRUST act to restore the immigrant community's faith in local law enforcement to paid sick days legislation. We should encourage common sense and innovation when looking at issues of poverty and inequality, and Connecticut should lead the way by passing the Better Job Act, HB 5371.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/econ14workingct.pdf>